



WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 5: How Can We Strengthen Ourselves in the Lord?

Objective

The objective of this lesson is to understand that true strength does not come from self-reliance, but from being deeply rooted in God's love. Through Scripture and examples from nature, we will explore how God empowers us with inner strength by His Spirit, how Christ makes His home in us as we trust Him, and how staying connected to Him allows us to remain strong, resilient, and fruitful in every season of life. **(You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)**

Featured Scripture

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

Ephesians 3:16-17 NLT

Lesson

Throughout the Bible, God often uses NATURE to help us understand spiritual truths. Jesus often taught using pictures from the natural world—seeds, vines, trees, water, and light. These were not random examples. Creation shows us how spiritual life works. The

same God who designed trees, rivers, and breath also designed our souls to live by staying connected to Him.

Sometimes we think growing stronger means working harder on our own and becoming more independent. But God shows us a different kind of STRENGTH. He empowers us through His Spirit when we stay connected to Him and **depend on His strength**, not just our own. The apostle Paul prayed that believers would “have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth, but the GLORY-STRENGTH God gives” (Colossians 1:11, MSG).

In our last lesson, we talked about the “river of living water.” This river represents God’s life-giving presence that sustains and cleanses us. But Jesus reminds us that we must come to Him and CONNECT to that living water. If we only follow our own plans or act out of fear, pride, or self-protection, we miss the life He offers. We can feel weak, stuck and unable to grow.

Today, we will look at another picture from nature that the Bible uses to describe strength and life: a tree. A **SIMILE** is a figure of speech that compares two different things using words like *like* or *as*. Scripture says people who trust God are **like trees**.

Jeremiah 17:7–8 says:

“But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. **They are like trees planted along a riverbank**, with ROOTS that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.”

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What nature image is used to signify strength in this lesson? **Answer:** Tree
2. What is it called when two different things are compared using the word *like* or *as*?
Answer: Simile
3. What kind of problems can happen if we disconnect from Jesus and follow our own plans? **Answer:** Weak, stuck, unable to grow

4. What is one way you are “like a tree”? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. Resilient when times get tough, connected to a source.)

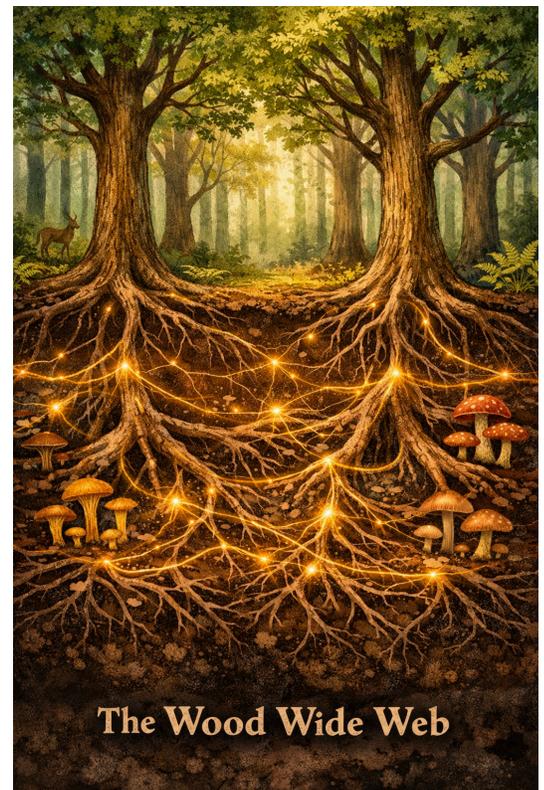
5. How is “glory-strength” different from “gritting your teeth” strength? Do you have an example from your own life? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. “Glory strength feels like you are just not having to work so hard to stay committed to seeing something through.”)

Have you ever stopped and really looked at trees? If God says we are like something, it is worth learning more about it. **Science—the study of the natural world—has shown us amazing things about trees.** In *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben explains that trees live in connected communities. They can share nutrients, send warning signals, and help weaker trees survive. Underground, FUNGAL networks connect tree roots in what he calls the “Wood Wide Web.” This works almost like a natural internet, helping trees support one another. People are a lot like that, wouldn’t you say?

Trees that grow near rivers are especially strong. They are built to survive intense winds, flooding, and HARSH weather. To do this, they grow deep, wide root systems that hold them firmly in place and help them reach water even during hard seasons.

The Bible gives us a powerful example of this kind of strength in David’s life before he became king of Israel. In 1 Samuel 30, David experienced one of the worst moments of his life. His city was destroyed. Families and possessions were taken. Even his own men turned against him. The Bible says David was “extremely distressed.” But instead of giving up, “David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.”

David did not pretend everything was okay. Instead, he chose to turn toward God instead of staying stuck in fear and hopelessness. Strengthening himself in the Lord meant



going back to the One who could hold him together when everything else was falling apart. God then guided David and helped him RECOVER all of what was lost—and then some!

David did not just try to hype himself up. He knew his strength had to come from being **in** the Lord. Jesus explained this idea clearly in John 15:5 when He said He is the VINE and we are the BRANCHES. When we stay connected to Him, we bear fruit. When we are disconnected, we lose our source of life and strength. “Apart from Me, you can do nothing,” He said.

Like strong trees, Jesus wants our roots to grow deep in Him. The Bible even gives us a picture of what that can look like inside our souls—like a GARDEN full of life, similar to the Garden of Eden, where God’s life flows like a river and produces good fruit from the “Tree of Life.”

The apostle Paul prayed this for believers who were facing stress and persecution: “I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong” (Ephesians 3:16–17).

Practically speaking, what do you think a person who is like a well-rooted tree would be like? Maybe they would:

- Feel stress but not be defined by it.
- Draw life from God, instead of being weakened and overtaken by circumstances.
- Know that hard seasons are remembered and marked but are not permanent.
- Share their resources with others who need strength.
- GROW and produce good fruit (like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control).

We have been tracking with the Shema Jewish prayer that Jesus said be a sure way to stay connected with God. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength... and love your neighbor as yourself.” Encouraging your own soul to stay and

REMAIN in this kind of connection with the God who made you will be rewarded with strength. When we are weak, He is strong in us.

One great scripture to learn to remind yourself that you are not left powerless is Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

You were truly built to be strong, RESILIENT, faithful, and resourceful to yourself and others. Stay in Christ and you will get stronger and stronger in His mighty power that works through you!

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What is the study of the natural world called? **Answer:** Science
2. What is the Wood Wide Web similar to in our world today? **Answer:** World Wide Web, internet
3. Who "strengthened himself in the Lord" when things looked bad? **Answer:** David
4. Name one example of what the Bible calls a "spiritual fruit"? **Answer:** Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control.
5. How have you sensed an interconnected information and resource web with your real friends or family, kind of like the trees have? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. "You think about someone and send out prayers for them to be strengthened.)
6. What does it mean to be strong without pretending everything is okay? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. "We can be honest about our situation before God and others without becoming hopeless or shrinking back.")

Context Clues

The Bible begins with humanity in a garden. In the Garden of Eden stands the **Tree of Life**, a symbol of life that flows directly from God Himself. When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost access to that tree. From that moment on, the Old Testament tells the true

story of people longing to be restored—to live again in strength, wholeness, and fruitfulness in God’s presence.

In the New Testament, Jesus fulfills the meaning of the Tree of Life by becoming the **source of life Himself**. He declares, “I am the life,” and “I am the true vine,” revealing that real, abundant, and eternal life is found in relationship with Him. Jesus is not merely pointing to the Tree of Life as a symbol—**He is the Tree of Life**, embodied in a person.

Jesus is then brutally crucified on a Roman wooden cross—another kind of tree. Remarkably, more than 1,500 years earlier, the Old Testament had declared, “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*” (Deuteronomy 21:23). By dying on the cross, Jesus takes the curse upon Himself and transforms the tree of death into the **Tree of Life**. What was lost in Eden is restored in Christ, who reopens the way to life with God. As 1 Peter 2:24 says, “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*”

Throughout the Old Testament, there are many moments where events, people, and objects point forward to Jesus long before He ever lived. This is known as **FORESHADOWING** and **symbolism**. Many of these connections were not fully understood until after Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Looking back through the lens of Christ, we can now see how these threads run from Genesis to Revelation—woven together across more than 1,500 years by over 40 different authors—telling one unified story of redemption and restored life with God.

Then & Now

Proverbs 3:18 says, “*Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly.*” Interestingly, science has discovered that our brains also contain **tree-like structures** that grow as we learn and experience life. These structures are called **DENDRITES**.

Dr. **Caroline Leaf**, a neuroscientist who studies how the brain works, explains that thoughts are not just abstract ideas—they are **real, physical processes in the brain**. When you think in certain ways repeatedly, your brain builds physical pathways for those thoughts. Dr. Leaf describes these pathways as looking much like trees, with **roots, a**

trunk, and branches. The roots come from experiences and memories, while the branches represent the emotions, choices, and reactions connected to those thoughts.

According to Dr. Leaf, **healthy thoughts**—such as truth, hope, gratitude, and love—form strong, organized “trees” in the brain. These help us think more clearly, regulate our emotions, and recover from difficulties. In contrast, **toxic thoughts**, like fear, self-lies, or constant worry, grow into disorganized, weaker structures that can leave us feeling stressed or overwhelmed. The encouraging news is that the brain can change. When we become aware of unhealthy thinking and intentionally replace it with healthier thoughts, it’s like **pruning an unhealthy tree so a stronger one can grow**. Over time, the brain becomes more resilient—much like a well-rooted tree planted near water.

Memorize: Write this on your heart

“Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong.” Ephesians 3:17b

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch Bible Project’s “We Studied the Tree of Life in the Bible” (4:52)
<https://youtu.be/TJLan-pJzfQ?si=FjVeJ9kngM8nuVTE>
- Watch “David at Ziklag: From Despair to Destiny” (8:16)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIBBFAY3R4>
- Watch “Secret Language of Trees” (4:34)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4m9SefyRjg>
- Listen to the hymn, “Just a Closer Walk With Thee” (2:50)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xjh0e5WDVQ>
- Read the story behind the hymn “Just a Closer Walk With Thee”
<https://www.godtube.com/popular-hymns/just-a-closer-walk-with-thee/>
- Watch Caroline Leaf’s short “Your Thoughts Aren’t Just Ideas” (1:22)
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1393962442136406>

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

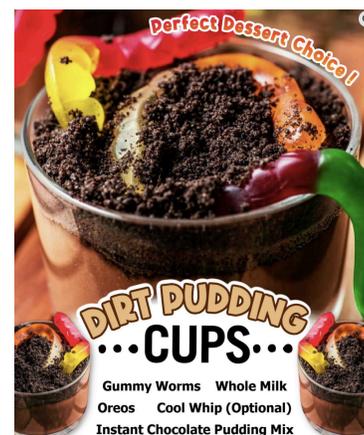
Choose **one** (or more) of the following ways to demonstrate your understanding of going to God as your fresh and flowing source for life:

- **Finish-the-thought prompts. Fill in the blanks with your own words.**
 - “Being rooted means _____.”
 - “The way I experience connecting with others even without words is _____.”
 - “Sharing strength looks like _____.”
 - “I find that my mind becomes stronger when _____.”
 - “An example of a time when I strengthened myself in the Lord is _____.”

- **Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics**
 - Write a poem or song about strength and trees.

- **Report**
 - Listen to the hymn “Just a Closer Walk With Thee” and read about the story. Research a little more about “Negro Spirituals” and how they used these songs to strengthen themselves while working in the fields during slavery. What did you learn?

- **Physical activity: Make Edible Dirt Cups**
 - Spell each ingredient: MILK, PUDDING, WHIPPED TOPPING, OREOS, GUMMY WORMS and make the recipe together. (Look up “Dirt Cups”).



Spelling Words to Practice This Week

1. NATURE
2. STRENGTH
3. CONNECT
4. SIMILE
5. ROOTS
6. FUNGAL
7. HARSH
8. RECOVER
9. VINE
10. BRANCHES
11. GARDEN
12. GROW
13. REMAIN
14. RESILIENT
15. TRUST
16. EMPOWER
17. RESOURCES
18. SPIRIT
19. FRUITFUL
20. CONNECTED

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